IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-17 (Canceled).

Claim 18 (Currently Amended): A method of manufacturing a semiconductor device comprising:

forming an amorphous insulating layer containing metal, silicon and oxygen on a substrate, the amorphous insulating layer comprising a surface region and a substrate side remnant region, the surface region further containing [[a]] nitrogen of a first concentration which is 15 atom% or more, and the remnant region containing [[a]] nitrogen of a second concentration less than the first concentration; and

heat-treating the amorphous insulating layer in a non-oxidizing atmosphere, permitting a solid-phase growth to take place so as to form an epitaxial crystalline insulating layer in the substrate side remnant region in contact with said substrate while ~~remaining~~ the ~~first~~ surface region remains [[as]] an amorphous insulating layer.

Claim 19 (Original): The method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 18, wherein the non-oxidizing atmosphere comprises a partial oxygen pressure of 1×10^{-3} Torr or less.

Claim 20 (Previously Presented): The method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 18, wherein said heat-treating is performed after depositing a conductive film on the amorphous insulating layer.

Claim 21 (Original): The method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 18, wherein the metal includes at least one element selected from the group consisting of Zr, Hf, Ti and lanthanoid elements.

Claim 22 (New): The method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 18, wherein the surface region has a thickness of 1 nm to 2.5 nm.

Claim 23 (New): The method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 18, wherein the amorphous insulating layer containing nitrogen of the first concentration in the surface region thereof is formed by depositing a metal silicate film on the substrate and exposing the metal silicate film to excite nitrogen.

Claim 24 (New): The method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 23, wherein the metal silicate film has a thickness of 10 nm or less.

Claim 25 (New): The method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 18, wherein the amorphous insulating layer containing nitrogen of the first concentration in the surface region thereof is formed by depositing a metal silicate film on the substrate in a nitrogen atmosphere.

Claim 26 (New): The method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 25, wherein the metal silicate film has a thickness of 10 nm or less.

Claim 27 (New): The method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 18, further comprising forming an electrode on the amorphous insulating layer successively after forming the amorphous insulating layer.

Claim 28 (New): The method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to claim 18, wherein the heat treatment is performed at a temperature ranging from 950°C to 1200°C.